

Message Text

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ACTION SS-25

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FM AMCONSUL HONG KONG

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4452

S E C R E T HONG KONG 3605

EXDIS

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (CORRECT OMITTED PORTION)

DEPARTMENT PASS PAT HOLT, CHIEF OF STAFF , COMMITTEE ON
FOREIGN RELATIONS FROM MOOSE AND MEISSNER

E.O. 11652: XGDS-3

1. (UNCLASSIFIED) GIVEN YOUR REQUEST FOR INFORMATION
SOONEST AND NOT KNOWING WHAT CONSTRAINTS THERE MAY BE ON
COMMUNICATING WITH YOU ONCE WE REACH SAIGON, WE OFFER THE
FOLLOWING BASED ON BRIEFINGS, CONSULATIONS AND CONVERSATIONS
TO DATE:

2. CAMBODIA: (A) (UNCLASSIFIED) IT SEEMS DOUBTFUL WE
WILL GET TO PHNOM PENH AND WE PROBABLY WILL LEARN LITTLE
NEW ABOUT CAMBODIA ONCE WE REACH SAIGON.

(B) (UNCLASSIFIED) THE MILITARY SITUATION AROUND
PHNOM PENH APPEARS TO BE DETERIORATING SO RAPIDLY
THAT THE SUPPLEMENTAL MILITARY AID QUESTION MAY BE MOOT
BY MONDAY. THE RECENT FALL AT NEAK LUONG AND BANAM HAS
RELEASED 1-3,000 INSURGENT TROOPS FOR ATTACK AGAINST PHNOM
PENH'S WEAKLY DEFENDED SOUTHERN PERIMETER.

(C) (SECRET) REPORTS INDICATE FURTHER INFLUX OF
INSURGENT TROOPS DRAWN FROM PROVINCES FOR FINAL MOVES ON
CAPITAL. INSURGENTS ALREADY HOLD POSITIONS FROM WHICH
CITY AND AIRPORT CAN BE BROUGHT UNDER HIGHLY ACCURATE
105 MM HOWITZER FIRE. TERRORIST ACTIVITIES WITHIN CITY
ARE AN INCREASING POSSIBILITY. US OFFICIALS ESTIMATE

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CAMBODIAN AIR FORCE WILL SHORTLY BE NON-OPERATIONAL.

DESPITE AIRLIFT, MALNUTRITION AND STARVATION SAID TO BE REACHING CRISIS PROPORTIONS.

(D) (CONFIDENTIAL) WE ARE TOLD THAT NOTWITHSTANDING FOREGOING SOME CAMBODIAN LEADERS CLING TO HOPE THAT AMERICANS WILL SOMEHOW "SAVE" THEM. AIRPORT MAY SOON BE INTERDICTED AND, WITH FALL OF NEAK LUONG, MEKONG UNLIKELY EVEN TO BE REOPENED. ADDITIONAL MILITARY AID, IF AVAILABLE, WOULD PROBABLY BE UNDELIVERABLE. IN ANY EVENT, NO ANALYST WITH WHOM WE HAVE SPOKEN BELIEVES AID WOULD ENABLE GOVERNMENT FORCES TO BREAK PRESENT SIEGE OR REVERSE PRESENT TERMINAL TREND. ACCORDINGLY, COMMITTEE MIGHT WISH TO CONCENTRATE ON QUESTIONS OF HOW HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE CAN BEST BE GOTTEN TO CAMBODIAN PEOPLE AND HOW FUTURE US INTERESTS IN CAMBODIA CAN BEST BE SERVED VIS A VIS THE LIKELY SUCCESSOR GOVERNMENT.

(E) (UNCLASSIFIED) IN THE LATTER CONNECTION, THE PROSPECT OF RECEIVING SUBSTANTIAL HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE THROUGH MULTILATERAL CHANNELS, COUPLED WITH THE ATTENDANT PRESENCE OF INTERNATIONAL RELIEF WORKERS MIGHT GO FAR TOWARD SOFTENING POSSIBLE HARSHNESS OF INSURGENT TAKEOVER. DEMONSTRATION OF US WILLINGNESS TO CONTRIBUTE TO AN EFFORT DESIGNED TO REACH ALL CAMBODIANS MIGHT ENCOURAGE NEW GOVERNMENT IN MAINTAINING ITS FREEDOM OF ACTION, ESPECIALLY, AS REGARD THE NORTH VIETNAMESE.

2. VIETNAM: (A) (SECRET) NORTH VIETNAMESE STRENGTH IN MR-3 AREA SURROUNDING SAIGON IS BUILDING STEADILY. ARRIVAL IN AREA OF ADDITIONAL NVA DIVISIONS NOW EN ROUTE FROM OTHER REGIONS, INCLUDING POSSIBLY TWO OUT OF THE THREE REMAINING STRATEGIC RESERVE DIVISIONS FROM NORTH VIET-NAM, WOULD GIVE HANOI DECISIVE EDGE. MOST ANALYSTS EXPECT HANOI WILL CONTINUE TO EXPORT PRESENT MOMENTUM. THUS, BATTLE FOR SAIGON COULD BEGIN AT ANY TIME BUT MOST BELIEVE CERTAINLY WITHIN TWO WEEKS. PRESENT THREAT TO SAIGON FROM NORTHWEST WILL SOON BE COMPOUNDED BY NVA MOVES FROM EAST AND NEW THREATS TO ITS LINKS WITH THE DELTA. MOREOVER, ACCESS TO SAIGON BY SEA COULD SOON BE INTERDICTED THUS PLACING THE CITY IN SITUATION SIMILAR TO PHNOM PENH. AIRLIFT WOULD BE EXTRAORDINARILY DIFFICULT TO SUSTAIN FOR A NUMBER OF REASONS, INCLUDING DOUBTFUL AVAILABILITY OF SECRET

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THAI FACILITIES.

(B) (SECRET) US OFFICIALS SAY THERE ARE APPROXIMATELY 6,000 AMERICAN IN SOUTH VIET-NAM WHO WILL NEED TO BE EVACUATED, PLUS LARGE NUMBER OF VIETNAMESE TO WHOM US OBLIGATED. ESTIMATES OF VIETNAMESE RANGE FROM 20,000 TO 1 MILLION, DEPENDING ON CRITERIA. THERE IS REASON TO DOUBT WHETHER ADEQUATE PROCEDURES EXIST FOR IDENTIFYING AND COLLECTING VIETNAMESE TO BE EVACUATED OR THAT SUCH

ARRANGEMENTS CAN NOW BE MADE.

(C) (SECRET) GIVEN THE LARGE NUMBERS OF PEOPLE INVOLVED, WHETHER VIETNAMESE ARE INCLUDED OR NOT, THE EVACUATION OF AMERICANS FROM SAIGON IN LARGE NUMBERS PROBABLY SHOULD BEGIN NOW, NOT JUST THE REMOVAL OF DEPENDENTS. THERE IS SAID TO BE SOME RELUCTANCE TO INITIATE SUCH A MOVE LEST IT PRECIPITATE PANIC AND A COLLAPSE. YET PROCRASTINATION WOULD SEEM TO INCREASE THE EVENTUAL RISKS OF THE OPERATION, DECREASE THE POSSIBILITY OF TOTAL SUCCESS AND LIMIT THE NUMBER OF VIETNAMESE THAT MIGHT ULTIMATELY BE TAKEN OUT.

(D) (UNCLASSIFIED) EXPERIENCE OF THE LAST FEW EVACUATIONS IS THAT THEY QUICKLY BECOME CHAOTIC. IT IS OUR FEELING THAT ALMOST ANY PRACTICAL PLAN FOR MASS EVACUATION FROM SAIGON WILL REQUIRE USE OF US TROOPS TO ENSURE CONTROL OF LOADING ZONES. MASS MOVEMENTS MAY ALSO NECESSITATE USE FOR LIMITED PERIOD OF TIME OF TRANSHIPMENT POINTS SUCH AS VUNG TAU WITH ITS DOCKS AND AIRFIELD, OR CON SON OR PHY QUOC ISLANDS.

(E) (CONFIDENTIAL) THERE SEEMS TO BE GENUINE UNCERTAINTY WITHIN EXECUTIVE BRANCH AND THE ARMED SERVICES REGARDING LEGAL RESTRICTIONS WHICH WOULD APPLY TO USE OF US ARMED FORCES IN EVACUATION SITUATIONS. OBVIOUS SENSITIVITY OF THIS ISSUE AND APPARENT RELUCTANCE OF EXECUTIVE BRANCH TO INITIATE ADVANCE CONSULTATIONS SUGGESTS DESIRABILITY OF RENEWED BUT DISCREET CONGRESSIONAL INITIATIVE. PROBLEMS INVOLVED ALL APPEAR SOLVABLE AND MISUNDERSTANDINGS AVOIDABLE PROVIDED CONSULTATION BEGINS SOON.

(F) (UNCLASSIFIED) ONE OF CONSISTENT PROBLEMS OF LAST FEW DAYS SEEMS TO HAVE BEEN DIFFICULTY OF GRASPING OR ACCEPTING SPEED AND EXTENT OF DETERIORATION IN SOUTH VIET-NAM. RESULT HAS BEEN THAT GOOD PLANS TENTATIVELY ARRIVED AT HAVE OFTEN BEEN OVERTAKEN BY
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EVENTS . IF THIS PATTERN CONTINUES, RESULTS IN SAIGON COULD BE EVEN MORE CATASTROPHIC THAN THOSE ALONG THE COAST.NEED FOR CLOSE EXECUTIVE-LEGISLATIVE CONSULTATION ON THESE PROBLEMS SEEMS ESSENTIAL.

(G) (UNCLASSIFIED) OUR VIEWS THUS FAR ON OTHER HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS IN VIET-NAM ARE SIMILAR TO THOSE EXPRESSED ABOVE WITH REGARD TO CAMBODIA. IN ADDITION, WE HAVE SEVERED DOUBTS ABOUT THE PRACTICABILITY OF ATTEMPTING TO MOVE, OR TO CARE FOR AFTER THEIR MOVEMENT, ANY MASSIVE NUMBER OF VIETNAMESE REFUGEES. WE MIGHT BETTER CONCENTRATE ON FINDING WAYS TO ASSIST THEM WHERE THEY ARE. IN THIS CONNECTION, IT WOULD SEEM DESIRABLE TO BEGIN CHANNELING MUCH OF OUR RELIEF EFFORT THROUGH THE MULTILATERAL AGENCIES WITH WHOM HANOI AND THE PRG HAVE ALREADY INDICATED A WILLINGNESS TO DEAL.

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NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED ABOVE ADDRESSEE.

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